

a sculpture by  
**HERBERT FERBER**  
to create an environment



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Whitney Museum of American Art

22 WEST 54TH STREET, NEW YORK

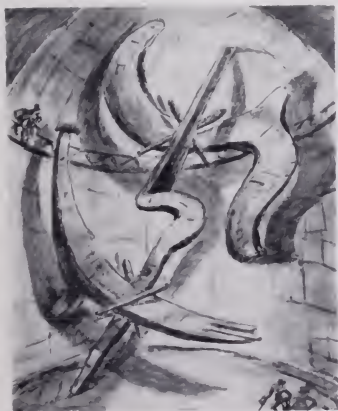
**S**CULPTURE has gone through more radical changes in the 20th century than any traditional branch of art. The destruction of its solidity by the Constructivists released energies as astonishing as those of the atom. A new imagery — sometimes figurative, more often abstract, sometimes classical, more often romantic — has poured out in a revolution based on one relatively simple concept: that image and space are more important than mass and material. Freed from the restrictions of block and armature, modern sculpture has rivalled in its own way the flexibility of painting.

Yet the new sculpture, for all its freedom and dynamic organization, remains an object; it is here, on wall or pedestal, the spectator is there, inevitably outside it. In the last few years a different concept has begun to emerge, a concept of sculpture as an environment, an ambience, a surrounding and engulfing experience. The relation between the viewer and this sculpture is no longer that of spectator and object; it is the relation of man to an esthetic force which embraces him totally. The experience, as Ferber has written, is akin to that of entering a chapel where one is immersed in an atmosphere that cannot be altered or dispelled except by leaving. In this respect, the new sculpture is closer to architecture than to painting, although the huge canvases of artists like Kline and Rothko seem designed for the same enveloping end.

Herbert Ferber is modest about his role in this revolution: he points to Frederick Kiesler's *Galaxy* of 1947, Mathias Goeritz's *Echo* of 1953 and the more recent rooms of Louise Nevelson as steps in the new direction. But Ferber's own development, since at least 1954, has led to perhaps the most complete realization of the environmental concept. His roofed and walled sculpture, which began at that time, might be called environments in miniature, defined spaces activated by the drama of forms in tension. It was while working on the interior of such a piece that he realized the extraordinary "presence" it exerted when entered physically. There followed a series of models and drawings in which Ferber peopled rooms and gardens of every shape, proportion and size with organic sculptural forms which seem to grow, like trees or giant stalagmites, from walls, floors and ceilings. The romantic atmosphere of the drawings, in particular, suggests the strange world of Piranesi.

Finally there has come this work, the first full-scale embodiment of Ferber's new ideal. Designed specifically for the Museum's gallery, it is an ingenious technical achievement, which makes use of polyvinyl resin in a light, strong and durable construction. More important is the sculptural drama with which it charges the once neutral atmosphere of this small room — a drama enacted on every side of the spectator with extraordinary effect. Its impact must be experienced to be understood.

JOHN I. H. BAUR





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